

# Being the Change:

## Building Communities of Collaboration and Co-inspiration for Systemic Change

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November 13, 2011

### The Academy for Systemic Change

**Why now?** There are no shortages of inspiring innovations today in creating healthier institutions and larger systems these institutions create.

... And yet we are far away from what we need to accomplish in order to assure a future of social and biological well being.

**What?** The Academy for Systemic Change is a collaborative initiative aimed at fostering collaboration among leading exemplars of systemic change. Our aim is to bring together the best tools and proven strategies with the most gifted practitioners to show what is possible to shift systems that matter – in business, education, health, community development, and governance – at a scale that matters.

Sitting behind our ecological, social and economic crises is a cultural and spiritual crisis, a pervasive fatalism that generates anger, denial, and polarization in facing our profound challenges. “The greatest limit to development in Africa is fatalism – if people do not believe they can shape their future, all other forms of help will just reinforce that belief,” said Mwalimu Musheshe 25 years ago in founding URDT, one of the most successful grass roots development organizations in Africa, and one of “exemplars of systemic change” that inspires us to realize that what is needed is ultimately a social movement, an awakening of awareness as to what is possible.

In our own fields of action, as educators, business people, capacity builders, community organizers, and change leaders, we are working to connect, inspire and co-create learning communities around the world - with the conviction that all we need already exists, save the connections to realize what it might all mean together.

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Claudia and Peter are also co-founders of the Academy for Systemic Change, a global initiative to help promising systemic change networks achieve a great scale of impact.

*An Inside Job That Can Only Be Undertaken Together*

# **1. Introduction**

*Accelerating change in critical systems that shape our future requires networks of collaboration and knowledge building commensurate in scale and scope with the sustainability challenges we face. This requires not only diverse organizations working together but different sectors like business, civil society, and government.*

Today, we and our colleagues in the Academy for Systemic Change are focusing on three archetypal systemic change domains:

-  *restoring critical marine ecosystems and fisheries,*
-  *helping businesses manage whole “value chains” for social- and ecological- as well as economic well-being, and*
-  *transforming public education - creating the curriculum, pedagogy, and school cultures to prepare students for the problems they will face in the coming century.*

The networks emerging in each of these domains have tangible goals for healthier systems – thriving fisheries and ecosystems, innovative business networks, and places where children and teachers thrive. They encompass hundreds of business, civil-society, and public-sector organizations. They operate locally, regionally, and globally. They focus both on on-the-ground accomplishments and advancing and sharing tools, methods and theories for further change.

But they are also seeking to bring about a cultural change. Those helping to build these networks know that the “system” is not just “out there” but “in here.” The institutions of business, education, government and civil society operate as they do as an extension of the beliefs, assumptions, and habits embedded in the organizations and individuals who shape and sustain them – that is, us. This means that we ourselves are an inescapable part of the change process.

In helping leaders in diverse industries build organizational capacities to continually learn and adapt, we discovered many years ago that the key was nurturing leadership networks at all levels, what we eventually called “communities of commitment.”<sup>2</sup> Such leadership networks arise from relationships among diverse actors based on respect, mutuality, genuine caring for the future, and a willingness to put our significance at risk. They embody an understanding that building collective capacity to co-create futures we truly desire starts with our own awareness and commitment. Such change is very much an inside job - as Gandhi said, “We must be the change we seek.”

This is no less essential in confronting the types of larger systemic change challenges we now face. Collapsing fisheries and marine ecosystems, business that exploit rather than nurture the larger social and ecological systems upon which they ultimately depend, and schools that fail to engage students and burn out teachers are themselves symptoms of deep cultural imbalances. Working to transform these institutions is not safe. They function as they do because of deeply embedded habitual ways of thinking and acting sustained by concentrations of economic and political power. The knowledge needed to support basic innovation in such systems is not detached academic theory or the technical analysis of reports but practical know-how shared by those deeply engaged in the change process itself: committed practitioners who inspire and support one another, who develop and share workable change strategies, and who create the social well-being needed to continually reflect on and challenge their own assumptions and ways of doing things.

Years of experience have shown us that building genuine communities of collaboration and co-inspiration is possible because they are a natural extension of our inherent social nature as human beings. People who are truly committed to transcendent issues like those described above and passionate about what is possible are usually eager to share what they are learning and help others along the path.

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<sup>2</sup> *Communities of Commitment: the Heart of the Learning Organization*, F. Kofman and P. Senge, Organizational Learning Center, MIT, first published in *Organizational Dynamics*, Autumn 1993. (A second revised version will be included in this new series of learning community references, winter 2011-12)

But, this potential is often unrealized, masked by hollow cries for “collaboration” by those busy competing with one another, due in part due to work pressures that leave no time for reflection and from the perceived risk of challenging taken-for-granted assumptions. But more deeply, such communities are elusive because “our inherent social nature” is obscured by today’s materialistic and individualistic culture. Whereas not so long ago, collaboration and sharing were crucial to survival (for example, in farming communities or tribal cultures), today the very term ‘community’ is more a euphemism than a lived reality. This makes the process of building communities of collaboration a sort of cultural archeology, unearthing ways of perceiving and being all but lost in the modern world. While there are many tools to aid in the work, those who would lead such efforts need to appreciate the depth of changes that are ultimately needed.

The aim of this introductory paper is two-fold: to illuminate these deeper shifts and to summarize the basics of practical leadership strategies, ways of simultaneously focusing on the problems at hand while addressing deeper changes. Organizations, like people, can learn and evolve, from focusing only on themselves and their short-term needs and where management seeks mostly to control to cultures that tap people’s spirit and intelligence and where management seeks to grow people in order to grow the organization. As this happens, they learn to pay attention to larger systemic imbalances beyond their direct control and for which collaboration is needed and where developing not only new skills but new consciousness is essential. In this paper, we start with the deeper cultural shifts because not understanding them limits the effectiveness of many otherwise capable and committed leaders.

## **2. Our Present Situation**

### *Seeing Cultural Dysfunction*

*It is natural that people’s attention in change efforts focuses on tangible economic, social, and ecological problems. But, today, the changes needed are only possible by attending to the deeper cultural dysfunctions from which these problems emanate. These dysfunctions are very hard to see, and we almost never address them directly.*

As the old joke goes, “It is hard to know what fish talk about, but you can be sure it is not water.” As the water we swim in, these subtle aspects of culture are all but invisible to us – and they will continue to control how we think and act until we recognize them.

The original exploration of communities of commitment identified three basic imbalances, corresponding to how we relate to our perception, our circumstances, and to one another:<sup>3</sup>

- ✚ **fragmentation**: a deep habit of perception to break complex problems into isolated pieces and then attempt to address the pieces separately;
- ✚ **reactiveness**: focusing only on visible problem symptoms and not on their deeper sources, forcing us to react to these symptoms rather than creating longer-term systemic change; and
- ✚ **destructive competition**: pitting individuals and organizations against one another in win-lose contexts that prevent balancing cooperation and competition.

In many ways, school is the archetypal embodiment of these dysfunctions, and though we didn't use these terms we all encountered each in our earliest days as a schoolchild. Take fragmentation. Prior to entering school, life is learning: walking, talking, riding bicycles, learning how to get along with family members and children on the playground. This learning is inseparable from the day-to-day living. We live our learning; we learn through our living. School changes all that as we encounter a system of 'learning' fragmented from daily life. Students suddenly find themselves reacting to an agenda of what needs to be learned given by their teacher. They gradually discover that schoolroom learning is about right and wrong answers not more effective action, and that it pits them against one another in a process mediated by a teacher who is the ultimate arbiter of right answers. They eventually realize that academic knowledge is broken up into separate subject domains, like arithmetic (which later becomes mathematics), spelling, grammar, and history. These fields have little to do with one another, and soon these boundaries solidify further as they encounter classes that are exclusively about fragmented subjects taught by teachers who are strictly subject matter experts. Lost in all of this is the fact that life – solving real problems in work settings, raising children, citizenship – has not changed. It is still inescapably holistic. When was the last time you encountered a real-life problem that was only technical and not about how people implement a technical solution, or only about history and not how history is embodied in people's assumptions and habits today?

These dysfunctions are no less evident in work organizations, starting with the familiar fragmented organizational structure: work broken up into isolated departments. People inevitably adopt a reactive stance when they see only the symptoms of problems that manifest in their "silo" of accountability and are expected to fix them, which is possible for those which are generated locally but not

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<sup>3</sup> Kofman and Senge, *op.cit.*

for ones that arise from larger processes that cut across the silos. So, sales people react to slow sales with price promotions, when the real difficulties may be in product design or manufacturing, just as the school superintendents react to poor student performance with increased pressure to perform on standardized tests, when the real difficulties are unmotivated and disengaged students and stressed teachers. Locked in to reactivity, people compete for whose symptomatic fixes are best and will make them look good, while many others become increasingly frustrated and dispirited as more systemic problems go unaddressed. Over time, reactivity begets more reactivity. As deeper problems remain unaddressed, problem symptoms return and perpetual “fire fighting” becomes a way of life in even highly sophisticated corporations.<sup>4</sup>

Failing to see fragmentation, reactivity and destructive competition as deep cultural problems, we try to overcome their consequences by a management system that ends up reinforcing them all. Dr W. Edwards Deming, famous as a pioneer of total quality management, was an incisive critic of “the prevailing system of management,” which he saw as promoting non-systemic thinking and extrinsic motivation rather than cultivating “joy in work,” pride, and collaboration. Deming was especially critical of the simplistic belief in competition, which he saw as a particular trap in individualistic cultures like the U.S. “We’ve been sold down the river by competition,” he used to say, believing that *the* answer to all life’s problems is getting people, teams, and organizations to compete with one another and missing the complementary role of collaboration – such as by driving innovation in public education by fostering competition between newer charter schools and established public schools, ignoring the collaboration needed so that improvements thereby realized might spread to benefit all children, a movement strongly supported by the business community in the U.S.

At their essence, these dysfunctions are neither good nor bad. Like all cultural patterns, they enable and constrain. Today, they have become dangerously out of balance and consequently out of sync with our reality. For example, fragmentation has given us immense powers of analysis; much of the western scientific method is based upon this. But in a world of growing interdependence, our dependence on fragmentation prevents us from seeing the larger systemic impacts of our actions, and from developing effective systems change strategies. Likewise, life demands an ability to react to unexpected threats and problems, but when life becomes about

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see Nelson Repenning’s studies of failed efforts to implement effective process improvement in corporations – *Understanding Firefighting in New Product Development*, N. Repenning, *Journal of Product Innovation Management* (JPIM), 18, 5: 285-300

little beyond reacting to the crisis of the moment, it drains our energy and future vision.

Similarly, competition by itself is not the problem. Healthy competition creates space for new ideas and fosters innovation, and we have all seen the depressive effects of monopolies or totalitarian regimes that destroy this space. But we forget that competition can be healthy or unhealthy. Competition and collaboration are natural allies, as world-class athletes who train together can readily attest. The real problem is blind or destructive competition that undermines possibilities for collaboration, as a favorite story of Deming's illustrates. "A man came running up to me after one of my lectures and said, 'Dr Deming, you are completely right about going overboard with competition. I even compete with my wife. Think about it! If I win, I'm married to a loser.'"

Today, these dysfunctions are generating a **proliferation of crises and growing frustration at ineffective change efforts**. "In my experience, when business people are asked to help with schools, it is always in reaction to a crisis," says retired BC Hydro CEO Bob Elton "But business people also know about innovation and how to build enterprises. No one ever asks us to help in creating the conditions for ongoing innovation in education."<sup>5</sup> When we do try to intervene to address larger systemic problems, all the same difficulties reappear. For example, reacting to the critical decline in marine ecosystems and fisheries, different environmental NGOs have their favored interventions like quota systems or no-fishing preserves ("marine protected areas"), even though in most settings both are needed. They then compete directly for funding and personnel. In turn, donors reinforce the fragmentation by insisting on NGO accountability for implementing their distinctive programs, rather than on working together for overall system-wide improvement.

Likewise, competing fixes for education rarely foster the levels of shared responsibility and collaboration among educators, parents, students, and business- and community leaders needed for longer-term change.<sup>6</sup> Gradually, an attitude develops that nothing can be done, as illustrated in a recent comment by colleague frustrated over businesses' disengagement in U.S. schools: "It seems that more and more U.S. business leaders have given up on turning around U.S. schools, with the rationalization that they are global and hire from global labor markets."

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<sup>5</sup> see [www.academy4change.org](http://www.academy4change.org) or [www.campsnowball.org](http://www.campsnowball.org)

<sup>6</sup> By contrast, Michael Fullan has shown that collaboration – teachers helping other teachers, principals helping other principals, superintendents helping other superintendents - is a cornerstone of highly successful large scale efforts in places like Ontario, Canada (M. Fullan, *All Systems Go: the Change Imperative for Whole System Reform*, Corwin Press, 2010.)



In the end, the ultimate consequence is an overwhelming **lack of awareness** of our systemic impact on the world. We carry on with these reactive, fragmented interventions while our larger planetary support systems decline. When the total ecological “footprint” of human activity is considered, The World Wildlife Federation WWF estimates that we use over 1 1/4 earths today. If China reaches the level of material affluence and waste of the U.S., it will be two Earths; India would make three.<sup>7</sup> Many adopt the naïve belief that technology will somehow save the day. Yet, despite the explosion in information and technology, we operate within immense knowledge gaps, such as between the reality of global climate destabilization and the related decline of ecosystems critical to our survival and our continuing pursuit of high consumption and waste lifestyles that create these problems. As reality changes, paradigms must change, but such change requires more than just information and technology.

There are good reasons why these fragmented, reactive and overly competitive approaches prevail: the alternatives require deep learning and change and are time consuming, difficult, and risky to implement. The resulting dilemmas are familiar to all leaders who try to foster systemic change. “Deep learning, the embodiment of new capabilities for effective action... (is) a developmental process that occurs over (considerable) time...” (*ibid*), yet we face problems that demand fast action. It requires ongoing cycles of action and reflection, in contexts that place little value on reflection. It depends upon trust and collaboration, in settings where people are increasingly distrustful and have little opportunity to build different relationships. Almost twenty years ago, we called this the “core leadership paradox of our time: action is critical, but the action we need can spring only from a reflective stance... that can transform and ultimately integrate our four human structures: cognition, emotion, body and will.” (*ibid*)

Today, we believe that a growing number of people and organizations recognize that the change processes needed are both deeply personal and inherently collective. Even as the core dysfunctions are ever more evident, new forms of genuine collaboration are arising. For example, at MIT’s 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration, Dame Barbara Stocking, CEO of Oxfam, and Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever talked about the strategic partnership that has developed over ten years between the two organizations, working together to reverse the impacts of global food systems on poverty, and thereby make them more sustainable commercially (see <http://bcove.me/4sf1twp5>). Such a partnership would have been unthinkable a decade ago, let alone two.

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<sup>7</sup> This is consistent with many scientific assessments that humankind is living beyond its limits: e.g., Rockstrom, et. al., *A Safe Operating Space for Humanity*, *Nature* 461,24, sept 2009. Holdren, *Science and Technology for Sustainable Well Being*, *Science* 319 (January 2008)

Such changes now need to move faster, broader and deeper – supported by communities based on building commitment, awareness, and new levels of knowledge. Such communities will connect people and institutions around shared aspirations and transformational strategies aimed at personal *and* institutional change, practical innovation *and* more generative leadership cultures. Without these, the hard work required for deeper learning will never be done. Without them, impatience for quick fixes and desires to ‘look good’ and build political capital will always trump longer-term and more risky change efforts. Without them, people readily get stuck in vicious cycles of increasing crises and reactivity rather than virtuous cycles of innovation and capacity building. “Without communities of people genuinely committed, there is no real chance of going forward.” (*ibid*)

### **3. Dissolving Dysfunction**

*Allowing something new to emerge*

*Cultural dysfunction is not a problem to be solved. Rather, it is a reality that can only be supplanted by creating an alternative reality.* The Renaissance did not solve the problems of the Middle Ages. It gradually created a new reality, just as did other great epochs of cultural innovation in human history.

#### **3.1 Learning how to pay attention to what matters:**

##### ***Guiding Ideas to Shift Awareness***

In our initial exploration, we identified three root- or generative ideas <sup>8</sup>:

- ✚ the *memory of the whole*: awakening our innate understanding of wholes as entities unto themselves rather than amalgamations of parts,
- ✚ the *community nature of the self*: re-discovering the paradoxical nature of identity as both individual and collective, and
- ✚ *language as generate practice*: discovering that language creates distinctions in to which we can live rather than just passively describing reality.

These ideas are not *instrumental* in the sense of providing usable tools to be applied to fix the problems of fragmentation, reactivity, and destructive competition. Rather, they could be called *sacred* or *developmental* in that they have *intrinsic* value in and of themselves.

When we evoke our memory of the whole, we remember our innate understanding of interconnectedness. The beauty of a poem, or a piece of music, or a face is in *the*

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<sup>8</sup> Kofman and Senge, *op.cit.*

*whole of it.* Artists have long recognized this, as expressed in Nietzsche's warning<sup>9</sup>: "What is the mark of every... decadence? That life no longer resides in the whole... every time there is an anarchy of atoms." Or, as is said to all aspiring poets, "To make the poem work, you must often leave out your best line."

This applies just as much to ourselves, as we rediscover that we too are a whole, living among larger wholes called families, teams, and communities. It is no coincidence that the word "health" comes from the old English *hal*, also the root of the word whole. To be healthy is to be whole. Our wholeness extends to our social nature, which is why our relationships truly matter for our well being, personally and organizationally.<sup>10</sup>

Lastly, seeing interconnectedness transforms our understanding of language and its power. The relationship between words and the world is not linear but circular. We talk about what we see, but we also see what we talk about. Why is vision so important in human affairs? Because, once articulated, certain visions transform awareness and ultimately action – as Martin Luther King knew when he anchored his famous "I have a dream" speech in one word, "freedom." From that point onwards, more and more people saw racial inequality differently, as a matter of freedom.

Our aim in this brief introductory paper is not to explore these core ideas in depth, but to convey why such seemingly philosophical ideas are even needed in the first place and to show how they can shift what leaders building communities of collaboration and co-inspiration need to pay attention to.

Deep guiding ideas are needed because the cultural dysfunctions are pervasive. For example, the physicist David Bohm argued that fragmentation is such a deep problem in the modern psyche that it can appear beyond our capacity to address: "Like trying to assemble the fragments of a shattered mirror."<sup>11</sup> (*ibid*) But Bohm was anything but a fatalist. Instead, he argued for "going upstream" to reverse the processes whereby we generate the fragmentation and spent much of his latter years exploring the basics of "dialogue" as a method for cultivating collective awareness.

Guiding ideas are needed so that practical tools and strategies can be more effective.

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<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner* (**complete reference**)

<sup>10</sup> For example, see Diana Smith's new book, *The Elephant in the Room: How Relationships Make or Break the Success of Leaders and Organizations*, Jossey-Bass, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, D. Bohm (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1983); *On Dialogue* (Ojai Institute, Ojai, California 1989), and *Changing Consciousness*, with Mark Edwards (San Francisco: Harper, 1991)

Much of our work has been focused on exploring and sharing such tools, but we have been struck by the different degrees of success of different people and groups using the same tools.<sup>12</sup> We have come to the conclusion that it is not tools and practices that bring about real change but the quality of awareness and commitment of the people that inspire and bring about change. As expressed by Bill O'Brien, a remarkably effective CEO and mentor to many of us: "The ultimate determination of an intervention is the inner state of the intervener." Tools and practices matter but their impact is more subtle than typically recognized: they are instruments in developing the understanding and skills that enable effective leaders to do their work. Paradoxically, this is also why their practical utility is important: if they are not useful, people do not use them often enough to sustain this deep developmental process.

Sooner or later, effective systemic change leaders develop a deeper understanding of the balance of practical progress and deeper change that they seek. Again and again, we have seen that the most successful leaders focus consciously on change across *multiple levels*, from individuals to working teams to whole organizations and even larger networks, and *across multiple modes of awareness*, from our common subject-object awareness ("what I see is real") to the empathetic (feeling the reality of the other), to the transpersonal (we are a part of something larger or a shared consciousness).<sup>13</sup> The key is embracing the whole of this change territory. "What folly," Bohm said, "to think that we can reverse the fragmentation in our thought and relationships by processes that recreate that fragmentation."

Practically speaking, embracing this broader territory means **learning to pay closer attention to certain key features** of any complex change situation, most of which are frequently ignored but which together build critical new levels of awareness.

### **3.2 Orientation and Intention**

Our orientation is the mental set point that we chose (consciously or unconsciously) and from which we see and act. It defines the way we perceive and interpret our circumstances and it conditions our motivation for action. Effective change leaders learn to pay attention to the motivation of people and how it is subtly shaped by their orientation, starting with two fundamental aspects of their own orientation, **embodiment** and the **creative** (versus reactive) orientation.

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<sup>12</sup> *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*, P. Senge, C.O. Scharmer, J. Jaworski, B. S. Flower (Doubleday, 2004)

<sup>13</sup> Developed further in Scharmer, *Theory U, op. cit.*; see also [www.presencing.org](http://www.presencing.org).

Our normal stance is to see ourselves as separate from reality we seek to change. This limits our effectiveness in ways that can be difficult to see. We see the problem as “out there” and we see our job as ‘change agents’ as getting someone else to change. When we do this, we take no responsibility for the causes of the problem and often end up pursuing manipulative change strategies. (often don’t feel or think we can influence or change the world around us.

Alternatively, we can adopt the orientation that “we are part of the system” and that whatever is dysfunctional in the larger system operates within us as well. For example, in one corporate project, a change team began to address the company culture of “punishment for bad news.” Rather than blaming the “culture” or “management,” the members of the group explored their own reactions to hearing about problems, especially from subordinates. They began to surface their fears about mistakes and their automatic reactions and defensive responses, like heightened competitiveness or a tendency to cover up the problems. Gradually, they saw their own part in creating and sustaining a “culture of punishment,” and the changes they could make themselves.

The Global Sustainable Food Lab is one of the largest system change networks we know of and an exemplar of a community of collaboration and co-inspiration. Founded initially by Oxfam and Unilever, the Food Lab today involves over fifty of the largest food corporations in the world and many of the largest global NGOs, as well as smaller innovative food companies and many local NGOs.<sup>14</sup> What has united such diverse players in working together for almost ten years now to make sustainable agriculture the mainstream agriculture system? In a word, they have all come to see themselves as part of creating the dysfunctions - like tens of millions of farmers driven into poverty each year and half the topsoil in the world lost in the industrial age - in how the global food system works today. As I first heard it articulated by one of the corporate founders, “We are all involved in a race to the bottom, going faster and faster to where no one wants to go.”

If we don’t see that we are the system, that the problem is not “out there” but that we are part of the problem, we don’t take responsibility and we are inescapably locked into a reactive stance. When this shifts, we are part of the whole. What we do matters, what we do contributes to what exists, and our approach to change shifts from getting someone else to change to asking, “How can we start to embody what we want to see in the larger system.” We ourselves become a microcosm for working out the issues in the larger system. Attention to what we do and how we do it become equally vital. We can the start to attend to how we are, how we feel, how we behave, and how we are often not present.

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<sup>14</sup> [www.sustainablefoodlab.org](http://www.sustainablefoodlab.org)

Herein lays a subtlety of real systemic change: what is most systemic is most personal, and those capable of leading in such efforts truly understand this. This systems change ethic was well expressed long ago by the American comic strip author, Walt Kelly, when his famous character Pogo said, “We have met the enemy and they is us.”

The shift to seeing ourselves as part of the problem then opens the possibility for a second shift, that we can actually create something new. This movement from a “reactive” to a “creative” orientation leads to seeing our own personal situations not as problems but as opportunities. We move from pessimism to optimism, from an emotion fear to hope, from desperation to aspiration. There are many forms through which we experience the shift. But at the heart of them all is a shift from seeing our circumstances as something to which we must react, problems we have to ‘solve,’ to seeing our circumstances through the lens of what we seek to create or accomplish, our vision.

Cultures around the world have long recognized the power of vision – “Where there is no vision the people perish” (Proverbs..) – but our biggest learning has been to discern more carefully subtleties concerning the source or orientation from which a vision arises. People who have a reactive stance toward current reality tend to develop “reactive visions,” change goals that come from their desire to impose their will, often with underlying emotions of fear and frustration. In his studies of creativity in science and in leadership Brian Arthur, pioneering economist and fellow of the Santa Fe Institute,<sup>15</sup> concludes highly creative people instead operate from a distinct state of awareness of deep listening where (after immersing themselves in the reality of their situation) they “retreat and let natural knowing emerge,” what Scharmer calls “presencing,” where we act as a vehicle for “what is wanting to emerge.” This paradoxical state of surrender and agency is well known to artists: “This is the true joy in life,” wrote George Bernard Shaw, “to be used for a purpose you consider a mighty one.”<sup>16</sup>



**observe your orientation, intention and motivation.** Learn to live in the questions, “How do we relate to the problems we see?” “How are we part of creating the way the system works today, including its dysfunctions?” “What do we seek to create?” “What is my work?” and “Who and what am I seeking to serve?”

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<sup>15</sup> *Presence, op.cit.*

<sup>16</sup> Preface to *Man and Superman*, G.B. Shaw

### 3.3 *The Individual as Social Being*

Isn't it curious that people recall experiences of being on great teams (in sports, the performing arts, business) as also periods of great personal growth. That is because human beings are autonomous *and* relational, unique individuals *and* mothers, fathers, partners and colleagues. We are both, but the individualistic Western culture tends to reinforce the isolated self, just as collectivist cultures can miss the power of the individual.

We have seen that many of the most effective system change leaders are masters at holding to this 'both/and' perspective. For example, today Nike has formal goals to eliminate all waste and toxicity throughout their entire product line by 2020. How did a company not historically a leader in sustainability come to be one? In many ways, it started with a small group of women at Nike who were master networkers, and who over ten years catalyzed networks of designers and business partners who shared this ambition. These women had a fierce personal sense of personal vision, but, as Darcy Winslow says, "We realized that the key was connecting with Nike's generative DNA, which meant new products." Within a few years, their passion had spread to over 50 lead designers and an internal design community committed to "innovate for a better world" was born. Today, all new products under development are rated based in "embedded" (across the whole supply chain) water, energy, waste and toxicity.<sup>17</sup>

Though they probably never heard of him, the master network builders at Nike would have appreciated the beautiful way the famous philosopher of education, Jerome Bruner, said that a self is not a thing separated from other things, but "a point of view that unifies the flow of experience into a coherent narrative" (*ibid*) - a narrative striving to connect with other narratives and become richer.

Accepting self as both individual and social also characterizes great organizations. You cannot build a great organization based on people sacrificing themselves. Our experience has been that most organizations, and ironically many committed to noble causes like saving ecosystems and educating children, fail to create environments where there is healthy balance between organizational mission and personal growth. This comes from personal and organizational confusion. People who are confused by fragmented individualism feel they need to fight for what they deserve. Organizations that forget that they are ultimately a human community develop management systems that exploit employees, whether intended or not, because they never learn how to create conditions where personal growth and exceptional

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<sup>17</sup> See *The Necessary Revolution*, P. Senge, et al, (Doubleday 2008)

performance go hand in hand.

These philosophical issues become highly pragmatic around how working groups and larger networks handle conflict and the difficult questions of inclusion and exclusion. As leaders in working teams, this means building collective capacity to foster dialogue and deeper conversation, to help people find common ground, and to see difficult moments of conflict as opportunities for transcending habitual patterns in favor of presence and connection to the moment and to one another. These are the domains of emotional intelligence and a traditional focus of “organizational learning” tools for working with diverse mental models.<sup>18</sup>

In larger networks like the Food Lab and other formative learning communities wrestling with challenging social and environmental issues, how you work with conflicting mental models becomes if anything even more pivotal. “model clashes” are inescapable among committed and passionate activists. But all too few leaders work seriously to build their own capacities for personal reflection, to balance inquiry and advocacy, and “build a container” that can hold truly diverse views embedded in the systems they seek to change (see section 4 below). Tragically, these ‘soft skills’ can be discounted in high-pressure settings where people are striving to achieve difficult goals in short time periods. The result is groups seeking to bring about systemic change who in no way reflect the diversity of stakeholders in those very systems, especially those traditionally marginalized - like NGOs dominated by highly educated northern scientists and wealthy philanthropists who are unable to engage local fishing communities in transforming fishing practices, or well-intended adults trying to improve schools who never think to engage students as change leaders.



✚ ***learn to observe as objectively as possible the qualities of your relationships***. How we are with each other, and the extent to which we generate respect, trust, openness and empathy, even in high-pressure settings. Be open to viewing these questions from the perspective of others, not just our own.

✚ ***Observe also the composition of your change leadership networks***. Would all the key actors in the system see themselves in the circle? If not, who is missing and why? This is never perfect; inclusion is always an ongoing journey. The real question is, “Are you on the journey?”

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<sup>18</sup> *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge, P. (Doubleday, 1990, 2006) and Senge, P. et. al., *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Tools and Strategies for Building Learning Organizations* (Doubleday, 1994).



### **3.4 *Process and Content as Inseparable***

In our normal ways of operating, we fragment the content or substance of issues from the processes of change. We analyze and then we act. Experts provide advice that others are suppose to follow. Leaders “devise strategies” that they then seek “to implement.” Yet, this very separation may be a primary obstacle to potential breakthroughs in situations where content and process must be integrated.

For example, The Global Sustainable Fish Lab has built a reputation as an unusual network committed to both practical change and deep relationships among businesses and civil society organizations. While focused on the practical challenges of metrics and management practices for long-term (social, ecological, and economic) health of global food value chains, the food lab also consistently creates a space where very diverse actors gather and learn how to learn together. They do so through a relentless focus on balancing key substantive issues and reflective change processes.

For example, “learning journeys” have become a common feature of all food lab initiatives and gatherings, which take individuals from diverse organizations and sectors on multi-day trips to see first hand parts of the food system that they otherwise would never see - and to so in ways that they also ‘see’ their ways of seeing. In one of their first gatherings, a global food executive traveled with a social justice NGO to visit a farmer coop in Brazil. Afterwards, the NGO leader enthused, “These people are getting organized - this is the best hope of the rural poor to gain economic power and therefore political power.” The executive was unimpressed, “If this is their best hope, I don't have a lot of hope. To me they seem completely disorganized.” In the ensuing hours of conversation as they traveled back to their hotel with others on the journey, the two discovered that though they had “seen the same things, they actually saw very different things.” Many months later, the executive commented, “It can be difficult sometimes to accept just how different are our perceptions, but over the months I have come to realize that we really do see the world very differently,... and that is the strength of the Food Lab.”<sup>19</sup>

Recognizing the contingency of our own awareness can be humbling, but it can also open tremendous space for those who see the world very differently to actually work together. When a new leadership team favorable to sustainable agriculture entered the US Department of Agriculture with the Obama administration, a historic meeting was held in Washington that, for the first time, brought together some 300 people

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<sup>19</sup> see Food Lab Learning history – **complete reference**

from all facets of the US food system - from the biggest players in the mainstream food companies (like the Soy and Corn growers Associations, Monsanto and Dow chemicals), to the largest retailers (Wal-mart and Costco), to much smaller successful organic food businesses, and a wide range of social and environmental NGOs. Because of its reputation for creating a safe, respectful, and yet pragmatic action-oriented space, the Food Lab was asked to serve as host for the meeting.

Masters at integrating content and process like the Food Lab network transform systemic change from "teaching processes" to "learning processes." On the receiving end of a teaching process, people quickly perceive that they are being "led by the nose" to predetermined conclusions established by the project or leadership team, which naturally leads to attitudes of low commitment and low responsibility for outcomes. When people are engaged in a genuine learning process, they discover that we are all in this together and that everyone must learn and lead. As Greg Merton, long time executive at Hewlett-Packard put it, "In my experience, the best leaders are the best learners."



**observe what you do and how you do it** - especially when operating under task- and time pressure. Are you and the team leading change operating in ways that embody what you seek to create? Or are you espousing one thing and doing another?

### **3.5 *Language as generative practice***

Words do not just describe an external reality separate from us. They are tools for shaping our perceptions and action. For example, fishermen who talk about a reef as "the rock" see the reef very differently from fishermen or scientists who talk about the reef as alive, a complex system of many species and habitat which is itself a high-order organism.


When our language allows us to notice differently, our relationship with what we notice changes, opening new possibilities for action. When a group of fishermen started to no longer see the reef as "the rock" but as a live being, a living system, they then saw species they had never seen before. They saw relationships between the species and, specifically, they saw the effects that the way the caught lobsters was having on the reef system as a whole. Not only did they start to catch the lobsters in ways that harmed the reef less, they stopped catching the large female

lobsters so the reef system would continue to be healthy.

The same shift occurs for children who learn to see how their words shape their reality. For example, three 6-year old boys in one of the pioneering systems thinking schools drew a simple picture of a vicious cycle of “mean words” and “hurt feelings” to better understand why they were having fights on the playground. Once they had created this picture, they no longer just saw each other as the problem; they saw the vicious cycle itself as something they each created and over which they had control.<sup>20</sup>

The first major hurdle in seeing realizing the generative power of language is, interestingly, the same initial challenge to working more effectively with different mental models: we forget the contingency of our own perception. We forget that we do not “see the world as it is, but as we are” - that we do not describe the world we see; *we see the world we know how to describe*. Women see a different reality than men. Sales people see a different reality than engineers. Activists see a different reality than business executives. This is not good or bad. It is human. We are living systems not cameras. We do not passively record external reality. We interact with our reality and in so doing “bring forth” a reality of our awareness.<sup>21</sup> When we understand that, we not only become more open to considering the realities of others but less attached to our own initial perceptions and more flexible in employing language that helps us get unstuck from those perceptions, like the fisherman who learned how to see the reef differently or the boys who learned to see the system that was producing their fights.



 **observe the words you use and how you use them.** Be ever alert to the “naïve realist” in each of us, the one who thinks we see what is and that we then name it as an “objective” (i.e., unconscious) act. Especially when things get stuck, remember that when we don’t have a concept we don’t see the possibility that the concept holds.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.watersfoundation.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=whatsnew.website>: first-grade problem-solving.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, H. Maturana and F. Varela, *The Tree of Knowledge*, **Shambha Press 198???**

### **3.6 Contexts and interventions for change**

Context is everything. The dynamics of systemic change are very complex, and the dangers of superficial fixes for much deeper problems always lurk. Effective change leaders are continually assessing key aspects of their context so as to better meet communities where they are and lay the groundwork for longer-term leadership and continual learning.

Over the past decades, much has been learned about change management, bringing deep behavioral changes to scale, processes and models of intervention, “theories of change,” and most of all understanding what are the conditions and circumstances in which change is more likely to emerge and be sustained.

For example, the three basic cultural dysfunctions can often be helpful in gauging a change setting and assessing types of interventions likely to be effective. How fragmented is the awareness of key actors or are people starting to form a more integrative view? Does destructive competition dominate or are there moves toward collaboration? Are people stuck in a reactive orientation or are they starting to see the opportunities present?

For example, most educators in US schools today operate from a highly reactive mindset, often seeing that there is little they can do to alter the conditions that shape their school systems. In these settings, it is crucial to establish limited change agendas where people can begin to achieve things that matter and build confidence and momentum. One effective strategy has proven to be short (2-4 day) hands-on introductory training sessions focused on usable tools in the classroom (like how to help young children graph change processes over time or older ones do an energy footprint analysis of their school buildings), coupled with in-classroom mentoring by experienced teachers and eventually strong peer networks where teachers help one another to continue their learning.

“When I started I was pretty intimidated by the technical skills I needed to do effective systems thinking with my kids,” says Kim Gimblett, a middle school social studies teacher in Tucson, Arizona. “I wondered if I could do it, but Tracy (the mentor) was there to coach me. Pretty soon, I found the kids loved thinking about thinking through systems for themselves, and I really did not need to have all the answers. After only two years, I am a lot less worried. We have a terrific network of fellow teachers who are all helping one another, and I have never been so enthused about new ideas for the coming year.”<sup>22</sup>

In the fisheries projects, fishing cooperatives can be important vehicles for engaging

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<sup>22</sup> See [www.watersfoundation.org](http://www.watersfoundation.org) and [www.creativelearningexchange.org](http://www.creativelearningexchange.org), [www.cloudinstitute.org](http://www.cloudinstitute.org), and [www.soledpartnership.org](http://www.soledpartnership.org) or [www.campsnowball.org](http://www.campsnowball.org) (check and update name )

the voice of the fishing communities, but they also often start with very low awareness of the marine ecosystem and can be very fragmented and competitive with one another. Under these circumstances, the first goals for a change process may need to be focused on strengthening relationship among the different cooperatives and getting them to work together on a common project that all can rally behind, no matter how modest the aims. In one instance, building a neighborhood soccer field for their children brought people together for the first time in years. Eventually, usually with help of a facilitator to help people ‘build a container’ for more empathetic listening, they start to just listen to one another’s aims and, slowly, shift towards more integrated, collaborative and generative responses.

Overall, remember that it is not ultimately about the tools but the tool users. As Bill O’Brien said, what matters most is our inner state: our sensitivity and level of awareness shapes the “intervention process” and will determine its outcomes far more than we often perceive, including our ability to connect with the reality that exists in any setting and with people’s dreams and aspirations. “The quality of the intervention is directly related with the inner state of the intervener”



- ✚ Be wary of *formulistic solutions* and *imposing what worked in the past on a new setting*.
- ✚ Pay attention to *who makes the intervention and how the intervention occurs*: is it led by the people themselves who need to change - for example, fishermen shaping their own interventions – or by people trying to get others to change?
- ✚ Pay attention to *facilitation in difficult meetings* where there are important conflicts and to whether or not *local capacity is being developed*, networks of local leaders who can facilitate effectively their own change processes?

*Learning through Doing: Knowledge*

## **4. Guidelines for effective action**

*Communities of collaboration and co-inspiration arise from commitment, awareness, and new knowledge, that is new capacities for effective action that enable new results.*

In this next section we summarize guidelines that in our experience enable deep processes of change that balance practical results with genuine capacity building.

### **4.1 *The Communities needed today embody new leadership capabilities and knowledge.***

The “leaders” who build communities of collaboration and co-inspiration are not just people in positions of formal authority, but people co-creating new realities. This means individual and collective leadership, shared leadership, and multi-generational leadership. It means personal courage and daring, blended with collaboration and cooperation.

This leadership comes from many people in many different formal roles. For example, in complex multi-stakeholder initiatives key leadership functions include convening (“bringing the system into the room”), facilitating and conflict resolution (“container building”), connecting and bridge building among diverse actors and institutions, ongoing network coordination and management (administrative and financial), and project management. Within organizations, we have found that healthy “leadership ecologies” can only arise from effective leading by executives, local line leaders, and “internal networkers,” people who come from diverse formal roles to cross organizational boundaries and connect diverse innovators and emerging knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

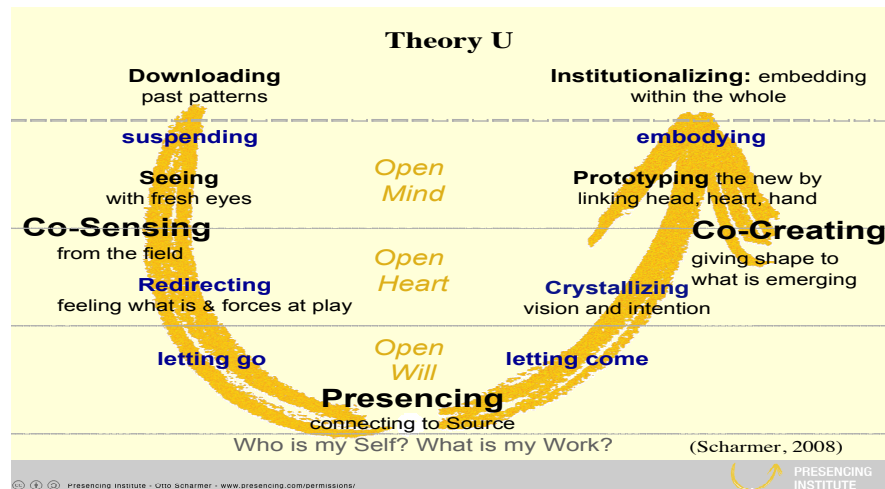
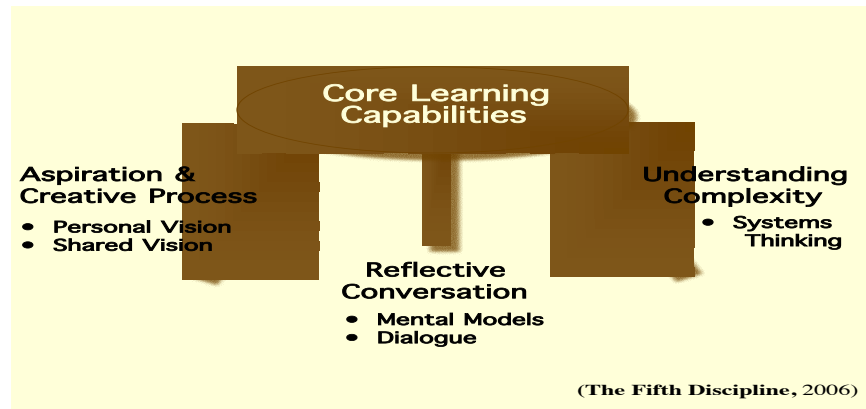
Cutting across these diverse roles and leadership functions are certain “core learning capabilities” like fostering aspiration and building shared vision, developing reflection and a different quality of conversation, and systems thinking and understanding complexity (three-legged stool figure below).<sup>24</sup> Over the past decade,

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<sup>23</sup> See Senge, P. et. al, *The Dance of Change Fieldbook: the Challenges to Sustaining Change* (Doubleday, 1999)

<sup>24</sup> Senge, P., *ibid*, 2006.

our understanding of the systems worldview and the range of skills and knowledge needed to build learning communities that embody collective creativity has been steadily growing to now encompass “Theory U” and deep change capacities like co-sensing, co-presencing, and co-creating (prototyping, embedding, and institutionalizing).<sup>25</sup>



What is particularly exciting today is how our understanding of these core capabilities is evolving within communities of collaboration dedicated to achieving real change at a scale that matters. For example, in the emerging marine ecosystems learning community, we are starting to work together with systems mapping tools to synthesize what is being learned around the world regarding restoration of critical marine ecosystems and fisheries - collaboratively developing integrative causal models of the forces that shape how different interventions play out over time in different settings. The practice offers a wholly new way to deal with the differing mental models by seeing how differing perspectives might each shed light on

<sup>25</sup> *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges*, Scharmer, C.O. (Barrett-Kohler, 2008)

different points of high leverage change within a larger system.

In particular, seeing the big picture together suggests that a critical interdependence of economic restoration of fisheries (as championed by advocates of quota systems), protecting habitat and spawning areas (as championed by advocates of marine protected areas), and social stability and local leadership (as advocated by social justice and community development activists). In different settings, different conditions will make different interventions more or less important. In different settings, timings among these interventions might vary for maximum impact, or that might need to be coordinated in different ways. Most important, we may be developing a common language for diverse players to think through these complex questions together in real settings - and a new approach to collaborative systems thinking that could prove vital in facing a variety similarly daunting problems.

While pioneering efforts like this are exiting, embedding this sort of capacity building in practical work settings is vital - something we have learned a lot about over 30 years in diverse organizations, cultures, and problem domains, starting with the simple fact that it is still distant from the ways that most organizations operate and most change efforts are led.

#### ***4.2 Learning occurs through practice and reflection, guided by ideas that matter.***

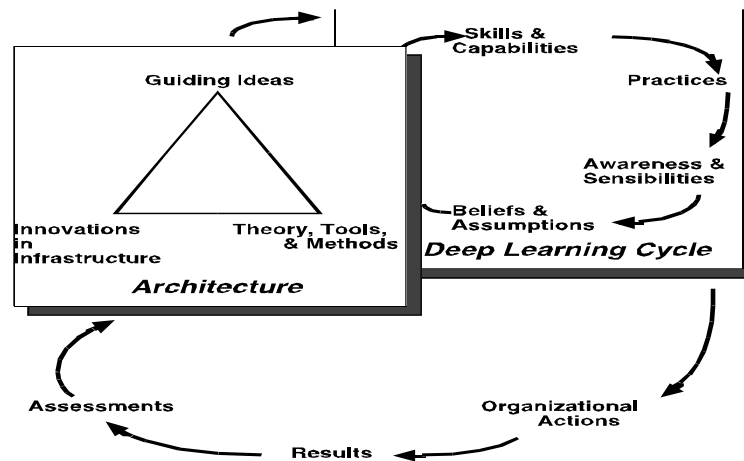
Watching diverse change leaders in diverse settings, we have found several commonalities in their understanding and approach:

1. They see building capacity as a priority on a par with achieving practical goals. “I have always been a developmentally oriented manager,” says Oxfam’s Barbara Stocking. “But the common change model is to drive changes from the top.”
2. While workshops and formal capacity building sessions are important, the real learning occurs in the working. There is no substitute for focusing on practical problems and tangible accomplishments, and weaving ongoing capacity building woven into how the work is done.
3. This requires both effective learning tools and consciously creating settings for reflection and conversation in the midst of the work environment.
4. All this takes time and patience,
5. And compelling longer-term aims embedded in guiding ideas that connect with people’s genuine aspirations.

These insights are summarized the simple “circle-triangle” strategic framework below, which distinguishes the “Architecture” for systemic change from the deeper



capacity building that ultimately shapes what can be accomplished.<sup>26</sup>



The “Architecture” summarizes three key areas of strategic focus:

- (1) **articulating credible Guiding Ideas** (such as visions, mission, and principles or core values) that are both aspirational and connect to people’s day-to-day reality - that is, have real “teeth” in terms of influencing people’s behavior at all levels (what one seasoned executive termed ‘governing ideas’ as opposed to the many ‘good ideas’ that are espoused frequently in organizations and then just as frequently disregarded under pressure);
- (2) **developing and using practical Tools and Methods**, based on underlying theories that have stood the test of time and that foster reflection and learning in daily work - and that those advocating change themselves use; and
- (3) **continually investing in Innovations in Learning Infrastructures**, resources that make it possible for people to integrate appropriate tools and methods into everyday work, and that support continued testing, assessment, and improvement of those tools and methods - such as capacity-building trainings, internal consultants and coaches, research that studies and disseminates lessons learned, and media that help innovators find and connect with one another.

While this architecture summarizes key change strategies, the real aim is deep and ongoing capacity building: advance in daily practices, skills and capabilities, awareness and sensibilities, and beliefs and assumptions. This “Deep Learning Cycle” defines a work culture of continual learning and development within and

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<sup>26</sup> The original version of this diagram appeared in *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook* *ibid*.

among the many organizations involved in a larger community. As important, it ultimately shapes what people accomplish - both in terms of manifest results and the quality of people's lives doing the work.

The key distinction between the Architecture and the Deep Learning Cycle comes from what can be changed directly and what can be developed only gradually. Elements of the Architecture correspond to what change leaders *do*: articulate and embody (to the best of their abilities) guiding ideas, identify and practice with tools and methods, and invest resources to support putting the tools and methods into practice. By contrast, the "Deep Learning Cycle" describes the changes in people, teams, organizations and larger networks that result, which gradually build new capacity to achieve what people were previously unable to achieve. This distinction reflects what every great teacher knows: you cannot *cause* learners to learn; you can only create the conditions that can enable the learner to learn for herself, himself, or their selves. This same understanding characterizes the effective leaders of systemic change we have known.

### ***4.3 Learning Communities are built by networks of leaders committed to share, learn and inspire.***

Beyond the skills and strategies of effective leaders is their spirit. Our conventional notions of leadership are embedded in myths of heroes - great individuals severed from the community who make their way through individual will, determination, cleverness, and often no small amount of ruthlessness. Attachment to highly individualistic notions of leadership may actually block the emergence of the leadership of teams, networks, and ultimately, networks of organizations and communities that can lead deep systemic change.

One of the reasons the myth of the hero leaders is so appealing is that it absolves us of responsibility for developing leadership capabilities in each of us. "To become a leader you must first become a human being," goes the Confucian ethic - an ethic well suited to building diverse communities based on trust, communication, collaboration, shared responsibility, and a broad commitment to each person's developmental leadership journey regardless of formal position.

None of this implies that hierarchy does not matter, nor that people in positions of hierarchical authority do not have influence. But it redefines the spirit and essential role of formal leaders.

First, we must surrender traditional notions of hierarchical leaders as the people "in control" or "in charge." Not only does this imply that those "below" are not in control, it ultimately creates a hierarchical value system that, as Ray Stata, founder

and CEO of Analog Devices and the Massachusetts High Technology Council, said, "holds the person higher up the hierarchy as somehow a more important being."

Second, we need a new image of effective hierarchical leadership, such as the idea of "servant leadership" that is well established in high performing military organizations: people who lead because they chose to serve, both to serve a higher purpose and to serve those 'they lead.' A ten-year strategic partnership between SoL and the US Army taught us that servant leadership is both an ideal and very pragmatic. As an ideal, it appeals to deeply held beliefs in the dignity and self-worth of all people and the democratic principle that a leader's power flows from those led. But it is also highly practical. It has been proven again and again in military campaigns that the only leaders who soldiers will reliably follow when their lives are at risk are those who are both competent and are committed to the soldier's well-being.

This is just equally true in building communities of collaboration and co-inspiration. Formal leaders perceived as competent and truly in service to the overarching purpose can provide both direction and space for others to lead. Their capacity to inspire comes not from having all the answers but from living the right questions and being deeply committed to their own continual growth and learning.

As a myth of the hero leader fades, a new myth of communities that can lead themselves emerges. Processes that produce genuine systemic change cannot be separated from this new leadership myth, articulated beautifully by a remarkable group of grassroots leaders many years ago:

"Our times are increasingly characterized by the awakening of the human force all over the planet, ... (and) a new kind of leadership capable of synthesizing the expressions of groups and organizing for action. Leadership from and of the group -- and from the least amount us -- is the hope for change in our time." (*ibid*)

#### **4.4 *It's not what the vision is, it's what the vision does.***

This is the aspect of vision and the creative orientation that is most often misunderstood. People think it is all about achieving your vision, but often many of the most powerful visions are never realized.

In the early 1970s, Alan Kay led the researchers at Xerox PARC who developed the first true precursors to the personal computer. In fact, Kay and his colleagues were pursuing a different vision -- they wanted to create a "dynabook," a fully interactive learning tool that would be as portable as a book. They failed. The prototype they built was too large and only realized some of their aims for ease of use. It embodied

however technologies, such as the "mouse" and the "icon-based" user interface, that had never been implemented together. They failed in achieving their vision, but they gave birth to the personal computer industry, which in turn has led to the host of easy-to-use devices we now all take for granted. It's not what the vision is, it's what the vision does. As Kay would later say, "We became a forcing function for change." (*ibid*)

Roca, Spanish for "rock," is another of the 'exemplars of systemic change' that has inspired the formation of the Academy for Systemic Change. Roca, operates in the Boston area and works with young people, mostly in gangs, who no one else will work with. Most of its employees are 'street workers' who themselves came from gangs. Their vision is that all "youth at risk" growing up in their communities will have relationships in their lives that are truly "transformational," that allow them to discover who they truly are and realize their potential to develop as human beings in service to their community.

Roca has not succeeded in reaching all young people in the communities it serves. Over 25 years, it *has* succeeded in reaching thousands, and today is recognized as one of the most successful youth leadership organizations in America. Along the way, it has also transformed many of the related institutions with which it works, like the police - many whom have told us remarkable stories of how their work as police officers also has been transformed by being able to 'work upstream' to shift the causes of crime rather than just reacting to crime. One young officer working closely with Roca was chided by an older member of the force when he returned enthusiastically from a joint workshop with the streetworkers. "What difference, really, do you think all this will make – so many kids are still dying on the streets," said the older officer. The young officer responded with a story: "A man walking on the beach came upon thousands of starfish who were washed up by a freak tide and lay dieing on the shore. He started picking them up and throwing them back into the sea one by one. Another man walked by and shouted, 'What are you doing. You can't possibly save them all. There are thousands. What you are doing isn't making a difference.' To which the first man responded, as he threw one more back into the sea, 'It made a difference for that one.'"

It's not what the vision is, it's what the vision does.

## **5. Creating spaces to learn**

*There are so many reasons today to be skeptical and pessimistic. We are facing a critical point in human history – ‘mankind’s final exam,’ as Buckminster Fuller used to say – and there is much about which we can be discouraged. But how we see and feel the world around us and how we see ourselves within that world will have a tremendous impact on what our world becomes. Whether or not we take responsibility for what we are creating, or see only external problems created by someone else, can make all the difference.*

... just as it is for us when we speak of "communities of commitment and co-inspiration." We do not use the term to describe an external reality but as a vision we employ to bring about particular changes.

When we see our own handprint on the problem, then we also start to see that something else is also emerging and we have the choice to focus on these new possibilities and to nurture and sustain their emergence. Exemplars like the Sustainable Food Lab, Roca and URDT, and the partnership between Oxfam and Unilever help us attune our awareness to remarkable examples of what is possible and what it takes to realize deep change. Much is happening around the world: many fisheries that are being restored, pioneering businesses that are innovating across whole value chains, schools inspiring teachers and students to step into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These examples are still disconnected and, lost in the noise of fatalism and pessimism, their success easily ignored or attributed to exceptional individual leaders or idiosyncratic circumstances - until we learn how to see how they are accomplishing what they are accomplishing.

It has been our aim to propose a sketch of the territory that is slowly, gradually being revealed and that can help develop this understanding. We believe a body of knowledge is emerging for systemic transformation. The principles may be subtle but they are not inapplicable elsewhere. While there are no simple formulas, there are tools, methods, and strategic guidelines to which we have attempted to point.

Most of all there is a sensibility, a style if you will. Once we understand the deep cultural roots of the problems we face, we also understand that the first principle for change is that we must both take responsibility for participating as co-creators of these cultural dysfunctions and then for embodying ways of being and acting that evoke a different culture - one based on wholeness, profound respect and collaboration, and our innate capacity to co-create alternative futures.

Our hope is that the picture we have sketched is clear enough that the many resources available to help practitioners at more concrete and specific levels become accessible. These resources include the extensive library or practical guides in both book and on-line format.<sup>27</sup> Over time, the insights from present work will add to these resources – and more importantly the communities themselves will become the key resources to themselves. For now, the most precious resources are the daring to get started and the courage to help one another.

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<sup>27</sup> *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook, The Dance of Change, Theory U, op. cit.* See also [www.presencinginstitute.com](http://www.presencinginstitute.com), [www.solonline.org](http://www.solonline.org), and [www.academy4change.org](http://www.academy4change.org).